

RESURGAM:

POEMS AND LYRICS

O. R. HOWARD THOMSON

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RESURGAM:

POEMS AND LYRICS

O. R. HOWARD THOMSON



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TO ADELHEID

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RESURGAM

THE warm wind carries in its breast a song ;
The mountain brooks make music as they flow ;
And scarlet tulips dare the half-veiled sun,
Flames, such as theirs, to show.

The tree-crowned hills suck in the vernal haze ;
Earth bares her bosom to the quickening rain ;
The wakened chipmunks slyly peep abroad
And blue-birds flash again.

And through the veins of watching, listening man,
There flows some little of that pagan wine
That called forth visions of fair nymphs at play,
Whose beauty was divine.

And in his ears re-echo ancient tales,
Told in the dusk beneath a violet sky,
Of hidden things in cedar groves, and forms
Soft-footed, passing by.

And though Pan's pipe no longer sounds afar,
He turns towards Enna, Proserpina's vale,
And to the Ghosts of all the vanished Gods
He softly whispers—"Hail!"

THE EASTER OF LAZARUS

PEACE, Mary! Peace! I do rejoice—
I feel the same clear fire illumines my heart
That makes the turquoise of thy sister's eyes
Shine like still waters in the sun. But I have died
And live again; and know too much to take
Part in thy exultations or thy tears.
I knew too much to beat upon my breast,
Or cast myself upon the ground, or cry
Aloud, when, midst the earthquake, and the light
That conquered that strange midnight of the noon,
Thou camest, wailing, back from Calvary
To weep. Nor shall I weep as thou wilt weep,
Some few weeks hence when He departs.

Nay, nay!
I am not cold: I knew that He would rise—
I learned so much when I was dead—But that,
Which thou wouldst know, I may not speak: and
that,
I would recall, I half forget. Hush! Hush!
Thou must not couple Lazarus with Christ—
Two risen from the dead—nor, through thy love,
Imagine death is past for Lazarus.
I tell thee Death grins satyr-like, and licks
His lips, against the time when he shall feast

A second time on me. Look on my face:
And feel the wrinkles just beneath my eyes:
They were not there when I was raised. But He—
If Christ should stay a thousand years on earth,
Anticipating the millenium,
Not one gray hair would show amidst the brown.

Did I not tell thee, that, when I was dead
I learned too much either to joy or grieve
In that abandonment of ecstasy
That makes the soul feel almost kin to God,
Or sport of fiends. I think more than I feel:
And, if my case were thine, wouldst thou not wonder
Sometimes, perchance, when looking on the sea,
Or in the watches of the night, when half
The stars are veiled, and nothing lives or moves,
Except the gloomy cypress trees, why He
Had called thee back? It must have been He loved
Me, and the priests are lying hypocrites
Saying: "He did it to impress the multitude."
He must have known all that it meant to me
To know that I must die a second time—
I, who remember what it is to die—
And make my body for the second time,
A caravansary for worms.

Go in
And talk with Martha, for I wish to think.

Yet do not dream, that I am not content :
Did I not tell thee that my heart was light—
It is no little thing to know, that when
He stood beside my grave, He wept.

A FANTASY

*"A man of a family great
Ran away with a pretty maid :
The maid she died, and the man he cried,
But his friends, they were all elate."
(Ballad).*

THEY called thee names—
Shrugged their round shoulders in their hate,
Whispering foul things they dared not state :
Yet, none of those proud dames,
Could make thee less than wondrous fair,
Or dim the lustrous red-gold hair
That girt about thy head.

Yet now, thy pulse is stilled,
And no more past thy ripe red lips
Thy breath in balmy odor slips,
For they, alas, are chilled :
And each dear eye is veiled and hid
By the fringed beauty of its lid,
To ope, alas, no more.

No more ! A world of woe
Is gathered in those words of doom.
The Earth shall follow in the gloom
The path that she should go ;

And all along that dreary way
Shall myriad eyes greet each new day,
Yet thine, shall ope no more.

Ah Love! how sore a jest
To leave me here alone, forlorn—
When we a deathless troth had sworn—
Come back, and make me blest.
Come back, and bend thy lips to mine,
Let thy rich hair with mine entwine,
Let hand repose in hand—.

Let thy soft bosom beat
In loving rhythm 'gainst my breast—
That place where thou wert wont to rest—
Until— Alas, I cheat
My mind with visions, fair but vain,
E'en now my tears fall like the rain
In witness thou art dead.

THE AGNOSTIC

ALL that you say means nought. I am not one
To be affrighted by mere words; else I
Had grovelled and abjured the verdict of my brain
When the high bishops of your wide-flung church
Condemned my soul to everlasting fire;
Or when Rome's cardinals, in scarlet robes,
Pronounced anathemas upon my head.
To you, had you been present, it had seemed,
Beneath the damnatory clauses of their creeds,
I must have shrivelled up, as shrivel slugs
Cast by a gardener on his furnace coals.
Yet still I live; still shines the sun for me;
Still apple-blossoms in the spring-time trust
The warm south wind to bring me where I lie
The fragrance of their souls; still in the morn
The birds sing songs for me, and perch upon
My chamber's window-sill.

I say you know
No more than I. Belief is not the same
As knowledge. When I was young, God sang
Within my soul; each church's cross-crowned spire
Pointed to Heaven; and every prayer I breathed
Rose on strong pinions to that far-off place

Where angels cast down golden crowns before
A throne, encompassed with a radiance
More lovely than the radiance of the dawn.
Well, I am old, and all my fire gone out :
My life has been one long dismantlement
Of gorgeous trappings which I stole from dreams.
I have my house, some books, and with some men,
Whom you despise, some little meed of fame.
I do not seek to gather proselytes
To spread my views—I know I do not know,
Nor ever can until my heart-beats cease ;
And even then, should it be mankind's fate
To vanish, as a candle's flame goes out,
I shall not know.

My friend, let us be friends.
It is not arrogance that makes man doubt,
Nor hate, nor anything save lack of proof,
Or if you so prefer, a lack of light
Within what you term souls. Let me enjoy
The comradeship of men who are but men,
The sunshine and the shadows on the hills,
The sound of water in the mountain dells,
The whirl of birds upstarting from the grass,
The scent of pine-trees in the lonely woods.
I have no children, and I sometimes think
'Tis better so. I do not know that I
Could give them such a youth as I enjoyed :
For I was mad, and every day I lived,
As I have told you, God sang within my soul,

And every pulse within my body throbbed
With passion to unite with him.

Well, well,
What use is all this wordiness? To-day,
I do not know—I do not know.

LILITH

As NIGHT withdrew, reluctant to fold up
The purple draperies with which she veiled
The garden that was made for man, Lilith awoke ;
And while her heavy lids still seemed inclined
To hide again the deep pools of her eyes
She, with the luxurious abandon of a queen,
Stretched her bare arm. She was so beautiful,
So utterly and wholly beautiful,
It seemed the sun, now peeping o'er the crests
Of Eden's hills, climbed drawn by desire ;
And that the stars, faint in the kindling sky,
Had paled in sheer despair.

A moment's space
Her firm, cool fingers played, unconsciously
As some young child's might play, amongst
The long blades of the grass, that grew a scant
Two palm's-breadths from the heaped up boughs
Of balsam-fir whereon she couched. Anon
She turned and resting all her body's weight
Upon her straightened arm, hung over Adam
With a stern face, her lips drooping a little,
And her smooth forehead puckered in a frown. The
light
Broadened, and a long tress of her black hair

Slipping from off her alabaster breasts
Touched Adam, so that he waked and lay,
His head supported in his hollow hands,
With eyes unblinking staring at the sky.

“Oh fool,” she said, then paused while regally she
raised

Her lithesome body to its utmost height;
And once again, “Thou blind, blind fool,” she said—
One had not thought that her soft lips could curl
In such disdain, though pity, love’s last fruit,
Strove with her scorn for mastery. “Will Eve,”
She asked, “with her soft limbs climb to the tops
Of the great hills with thee as I have climbed,
My bosom heaving never more than thine?
Or will she cleave the waters of the lake
Side by thy side, laughing to see the sun
Change into diamonds the drops that from her hands
Drip, as they dripped from mine: or diving deep
Catch thee below the surface and in utter joy
Kiss thee despite the water’s weight? Oh fool,
Oh blind! fit father of a race to come,
Doomed in its age to stay as blind
As are the new-born cubs the panther guards
From straying where the jackal hunts.”

Upon
The giant plane-tree’s topmost branch, a thrush,
Waked by a beam the sun shot o’er the hill,

Turned towards the east and cast about the leaves
Splashes of music, full throated bursts of song
And joyous orisons, until the air
Sweet with the scent of dew-encrusted May,
Vibrated in a soundless harmony.
But Adam lay as though he heard it not;
As though the earth were hideous and dead;
As though no sunlight was, no music breathed,
No perfume moved; as though the green-clad world
Could boast of nothing that was beautiful.

Then Lilith spake, "Last night the moon grew old:
Her light was jaundiced, and her rays were but
Pale travesties of those she cast when young;
Her beauty waned, it was no longer crescent;
Her farther edge was ragged as a leaf
Gnawed by a worm. Decay was in the air:
And through the grove, on bare-soled stealthy feet
Crept whispers, uttering lies. I do not say
This was thy fault; yet surely it had been
More worthy thee if thou hadst stopped thine ears.
When we two came together in the light
That bathed this garden on our marriage morn,
I did not ask thy parentage; then now
Why shouldst thou question mine? What if the
snake's
Were once my form? Surely my bosom shows no
scales:
Nor have my limbs, when by thy hands caressed,

Betrayed such origin. Look how the sun
Shines on my flesh: I dare his strongest light
Nor fear his verdict. Oh, thou purblind fool!
Dost thou believe that whilst thou art asleep
I steal away and, as a screech-owl, prey
On flesh of weaker things; or clothe myself
In vampire's form to suck the blood that flows
A crimson torrent through the veins of beasts?
What wizardry hast thou at any time
Beheld me use—what spells heard me recite?
Canst thou recall strange wavings of my hands,
Or braziers held above a charcoal flame
Surrounded by strange images? Such things
Are children, fathered by disordered minds
Frightened by something happening in the dark:
Yet, in this morning light, which should dispel
Doubt with the night-grown mists, thou liest there
Unspeaking; hugging to thy heart the thought
I caught thee by old runes, and held thee since
Captive by dint of web-like sorceries:
So will thy sons in future times, hug lies,
To salve their consciences when they desire
To ape the brute, and gain new partners to
Assuage their lusts. I would not hold in thrall,
Through magic, any meanest thing that lives,
Or shall hereafter live. I used no charm.
I was no demon's leman, learning spells
Taught me, while clasped in evil arms, to snare
Thee to thy ruin. What were such to me?
I tell thee that the whispers lied! Yet they

Glimpsed half the truth: I am myself enough,
Or so I thought, to lure from Paradise
One half her populace. Satan, himself,
Had been content to bend the knee; had been
Content to be 'God's man'—to fetch and carry—
Had but the pay been Lilith."

She ceased,
And stretching up her arms until they found
Support against the great tree's giant trunk,
Bowed her proud head between. Then Adam rose;
And looking neither to the right or left,
And looking not upon her where she wept,
Walked slowly down unto the water's edge
Where Eve stood gazing at her golden hair
Reflected in the stream.

THE HILL-TOP

I—THE HILL

THREE trees, that top the low hill's rounded crest,
Bare of all leaves, as earth of life seems bare;
A sickly sun, too pale to light the west
Or dry the damp that saturates the air.
What did I say to her, what said she in reply—
Should not our love have stood, us two, between?
How low the sun hangs in the leaden sky:
Autumn is ever gray as Spring is green.

II—DREAMS

Last night I dreamed many dreams,
One, of a year ago
When 'neath the sun's reviving beams
The hill was all aglow;
And nestling in the grass still wet
I found a purple violet.

She leaned against a young ash-tree,
My hands the flower held;
Far down the valley flowed a stream
That from the hillside welled:
I read my answer in her eyes—
Better than words are such replies.

Again I dreamed, a dream full bad,
For evil spirits hovered near;
Gray forms in misty garments clad—
Ghosts such as haunt the dying year—
They wailed aloud, "The Spring is gone,
Wander abroad—alone, forlorn."

III—QUEBEC

The streets are narrow, the hills are steep,
In the market place may no man sleep,
Nor ever stop for thought.
A stone shaft stands on Abraham's Plain,
To mark the spot where Wolfe was slain,
As he seized the prize that the great Champlain
To France by conquest brought.
Two tongues the people use for speech,
The priests a third for prayer;
And ever along the plaza's reach
Is heard the sound of passing feet:
The Scotch troops pace with their bare red knees
By the side of nuns from the nunneries,
And Padres jostle the bright red coats
Of His Majesty's troops, who watch the boats,
That form Quebec's small fleet.

Six candles burn in the church's aisle.
Here should a man find peace for a while
If in no other place.
He who hath lost what he loved the most

Cannot be saddened to see the Host
Offered afresh for a soul that is loosed,
 In token of God's grace.
Surely, the woman all dressed in black
 Must be the dead one's mother:
Ah, haply Christ will her tears unslack
 So that she shall not smother.
What name is that that her dry lips said?
'Tis the name of her child that lieth dead.
I cannot bear that her lips should frame
O'er her dead child's corpse my lost love's name—
 So out into the street.

IV—ON BARNEGAT

The halliards thrash, the tiller bends,
 The lee-rail buries deep:
The spray flies slanting o'er the bow,
 The waves like madmen leap.

Astern there drives another boat
 Her canvas bellied round;
Her sharp prow cleaves a true straight course
 With gentle, purring sound.

A foot or two I ease my sheet—
 The wind has grown a gale;
A flaw that strikes me unprepared
 Makes ribands of my sail.

And while I strive to bring my craft
Head up, into the wind,
To windward, passes that slim boat
A moment since behind.

Alone I drift, forlorn, inert;
Chill comes with sinking sun—
How should I steer, whose hands were weak
And lost the jewel they won?

V—THE MONK

Last night I saw a lean, gaunt monk,
With tonsured head on bosom sunk
A-telling of his beads.
So frail of form and voice was he,
I asked him if he'd pardon me,
If I should ease his needs.

He said he wanted nothing more,
Than that his brethren had in store,
Yet, looking in his eye,
I thought I read his secret there,
Naked and cold, and wholly bare
And that he wished to die.

I wondered why he took the vow
That made him such as he was now,
So piteous and sad—
I wondered if a woman's face

Denied to him, but full of grace,
Had charmed him as a lad.

VI—AT THE OPERA

Outside the wind blows chill
And snow-flakes filter through a murky sky;
Inside, are myriad lights, and people fill
The house from pit to dome.
How fair the women are to see!
White are their shoulders, milk-colored are their
 pearls,
Rich jewels glimmer in their perfumed curls,
Their furs are like sea-foam.

A bass viol speaks;
A silvern flagonet whispers soft reply
Then stops and sleeps. A shrill horn shrieks,
Like to a soul beneath the strain
Of mortal agony;
Throbbing the violins break forth, yet quick their
 song is drowned
'Neath trumpets' brazen calls and wood-winds' wail-
 ing sound:
Then all is still again.

A woman's voice of gold
Shatters the silence, as a sunbeam strong
Breaks through thin clouds too weak to hold
The earth in dark embrace—

She sings some old love song.
Curst be the world, and curst be those who scheme
Ever to wake in me that bygone dream
That I would fain efface.

VII—THE HILL-TOP

Again the hill and those three trees I knew :
Why did I go? Ah, God alone can tell ;
Perchance I thought, while knowing 'twas not true,
To see the spot might help to make me well.
I gained the crest and gazing down the road
Saw that slim form, that ever dwelt with me :
I saw the bridge 'neath which the small stream
flowed,
And heard the robins in the young ash-tree.

She came to me all dressed in yielding white,
With hands outstretched, the love light in her
eyes ;
Yet I stood dumb, and swaying in the light,
Groping for truth as for lost melodies.
Sudden her hand went fingering with her dress
And from her bosom drew a withered violet.
Has sorrow kinship with great happiness?
I wiped her eyes the while mine own were wet.

GOLD

IN the black of the midnight hour, in the womb of
the sweating Earth,
In the strength of their hate and power, the Hell-
Gods brought me to birth :
My muscles they forged in the fire, my thews they
shaped in the blast,
With a purpose vengeful and dire, I was loosed in
the world at last.
With cunning my seed I have scattered,
My grains of exceeding worth :
The might of my rivals is shattered—
It is I, rule the Earth !

In the gloom of the Early Ages, while the Earth was
young in her years,
By the hands of the wizened Sages, the Seekers who
knew no fears,
My grains were dragged from the places, where long
they had lain alone ;
They were shown to the many races who now are
the slaves that I own :
For deep in their hearts have they nourished
The love of my might and my worth :
My sway it has prospered and flourished—
It is I, rule the Earth !

The Kings that to dust have crumbled, the Knights
of the Ancient Day,
That over the Earth have rumbled, in heavy battle-
array,
Made jests of faith and of duty, made dupes of the
Hosts that they led:
It was for my yellow beauty that the blades of their
swords ran red.
Compared to my golden glitter
They counted all else—nothing worth:
With a yoke that is heavy and bitter—
It is I, rule the Earth!

I am followed by Murder and Riot, an Harlot reigns
over my feasts;
The tongues of the Prophets are quiet, and drawn
are the fangs of the Priests:
My chink sets the Nations to quaking, I govern
their armies vast,
The Kingdoms are but of my making, my grip it
hath gotten them fast.
The Earth and her teeming millions
Shall dance, or war, for my mirth:
By the glint of my golden billions—
It is I, rule the Earth!

WINTER-NIGHT

THE snow flakes fall,
And cold winds brawl,
Down the chimney and chill the hall:
The snow has blotted out pavement and street;
It lies dead white—it has no sheen—
But looks like a winding sheet.
Beyond the village the fields are white,
The flowers are dead of the frost-fiend's bite,
Of a moss-edged road there is never a sight—
God! for one patch of green!

The snow flakes fall,
And cover all,
Even the ground by the graveyard wall.
Two gaunt trees stand sentinel there—
It were better they were not seen
Their branches are so bare.
Between their trunks where bleak winds blow,
A white grave stone o'ertops the snow,
Which is the whiter, I do not know—
God! for one patch of green!

THE CHILDREN AT THE GATE

THE sturdy villagers within
The dark oak-panelled hall,
Had looked upon him as the lord
Who ruled them one and all:
And I without but watched the rain
Drip from the gutted slate;
The while some children idly played
Beneath the old lych-gate.

Bearing their load the mourners moved
And laid it in the grave;
Full in their faces drave the rain
Like spray whipped from a wave.
“Sancta Maria! Ah, how sad!
Might not the rain abate?”
And all the while the children played
Beneath the old lych-gate.

The white-haired preacher's frail voice broke;
None caught the words he said:
But; suddenly a sharp gust blew
A rift above his head:

Athwart the east a rainbow showed,
Its colors roseate—
The idle children kneeling prayed
Beneath the old lych-gate.

THE CHRIST-CHILD

THE Christ-child lay in the stable,
Two thousand years ago :
Mary, his mother, watched him—
The ground was hidden by snow.

The Priests they were sleek with good living,
The Pharisees feared not a fall,
The Merchants were served as are princes :
None heeded the Christ-child at all.

The Christ-child cometh each Christmas,
Anew, to the earth, it is said :
Mary, his mother, watcheth,
From heaven, overhead.

New Priests are sleek in their livings,
New Pharisees fear not a fall,
New Merchants are served as are princes :
None heed the Christ-child at all.

IN MEMORIAM

WHEN did we swear our oaths? I do not know;
For when we sware them, Seasons ceased to be,
And Time, freed of division, was as truly whole
As is the sea.

It may be that about us storms have raged;
That wintry blasts have driven keen-edged snow
Against our faces, till we stooped and bent our
heads—
I do not know.

All I remember is a sense of utmost peace,
A life, lived in a flower-bespangled field,
Checkered with sunlight, and perfumed with the
scent
That roses yield.

Now, I left desolate, would welcome change,
Time will not wake nor Seasons come again,
Though all the flowers are dead, and ever o'er the
field
Are clouds and rain.

TO DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS

BLIND are the bards that so much pity thee,
And couple, "Of the Sorrows," to thy name:
Oh, Deirdre! better if they wept for me
Whose love hath burned with unrequited flame.

Men should not weep because thou wouldst not
grace
The bed Conchubar long prepared for thee:
Thine was thy youth, and thine thy wondrous face,
For which so many perished dolorously.

Seven years thou hadst with Naoise and each night
Lay warm upon his breast, that knew no care
Save to fulfill thy wishes, till the light
Came with the morning, and he kissed thy hair.

Seven years before the King struck down thy mate—
So long a time the Gods were kind and gave:
Why should men weep because thou wouldst not
wait,
But chose to clasp thy lover in his grave.

Of me, alas, no man has wanted aught—

Like empty gourds my breasts are brown and dry:

Love with mere longing is not gained nor bought—

Not, though a woman panteth hungrily!

THE CRUCIFIX

ALL know that I slept in the old chateau,
Girt round with giant trees,
And that one night when the oaks sang songs
As they bent their heads in the breeze—
I found I was facing a crucifix
And praying on my knees.

The Christ was of yellowed ivory,
The cross was of walnut wood,
Carved by skilled hands that the Devil taught
More than was understood—
Else, why did I stretch my hands to seize
And hold it if I could?

But it came apart where the cross-piece stretched
Beneath God's thorn-crowned head;
The lower part was no cross at all
But a dagger's sheath instead;
The blade, though tarnished, was keen of edge
And stained with a blotch of red.

Am I, or the man who that weapon made,
To blame that mine enemy fell—

That my hands are red as the stain on the blade
 He fashioned so wondrous well:
That I, who slept in the chateau's peace,
 Now sleep in a prison-cell?

TO _____

SWEET, aye 'tis sweet, to lie at ease
Midst yellow daffodils;
To smell the vagrant spring-born breeze
New scented from the hills:
To stretch full length upon the grass
And watch the clouds above me pass.

Yet ah, much sweeter 'tis to lie,
My head upon thy breast,
Whose creamy whiteness doth defy
Comparison or test:
And in that haven of thy grace
To feel thy hair blow o'er my face.

TEMPLES AND TABERNACLES

"The groves were God's first temples."—Bryant.

LIKE drunkards to an inn, men flock these days
To tabernacles, where revivalists let loose
On fellow men, coarse humor, blasphemous abuse
And jibes. Surely the woods, soft with the haze
Of Spring's awakening, or later all ablaze
With Autumn's tints, should teach mankind some-
what
Of what true worship is; should show that not
From noise and shouting cometh worthy praise.

Peace fills the places which God made for prayer:
No sounds obtrude save whispering winds and
song
Of trusting birds: no rough exhorters there
Denounce, with uncouth oratory and strong
Repellent voices, creatures He has made—
Within God's temples all walk unafraid.

THE DEAD SCIENTIST

EACH year, anew, he felt he could not fail
To tear the veil that Nature held, and strove
Amidst a mental labyrinth that, (like a grove
Which sucks the sun and makes the noonday pale,)
Made shadows seem like giants, while the trail
Was blotted out, and the law he sought
To show why atoms when in contact brought
Should flash to life, was sought without avail.

His brain is stilled, and all the thoughts he cast
In studied phrases, while he slowly trod
The laboratory's length, are but the past
Babblings of genius bound to a testing-rod:
Yet on his lips a smile tells how at last
He passed the baffling curtain, and found—God.

DEATH AND LIFE

THERE are too many feeble souls to-day
Who drape their shoulders with the poet's robe
And attitudinize, as if this globe
Were better for their vaporings: souls that display
Lean, pigmy thoughts tricked out in the array
Of magic poesy; weak souls whose breath
Is all exhausted in a pæan of Death,
Sole solace of their unheroic clay.

Great souls face death unflinching, with calm eyes,
Heirs of Rhegium and the Spartan brood:
Yet, they attest life's pulsing ecstasies
And the mad glory of its amplitude.
Death, is denial: Life, an act of God—
Pity poor things grown envious of the sod!

TRIOLET

GIVE me a red rose from thy hair
To wear forever on my breast;
If thou wouldst ease my deep despair
Give me a red rose from thy hair,
Touched by thy hands so white and fair;
If thou wouldst make me doubly blest,
Give me a red rose from thy hair
To wear forever on my breast.

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